

Clarifying Student Learning Outcomes (Rubric I-III)

Program learning outcomes (PLOs) are inclusive, specific, and rigorous statements about knowledge and skills the graduating seniors acquire as a consequence of the curriculum.

The PLO should complete this hypothesis about the curriculum:

If our curriculum prepares students for a ____ degree (e.g., BA, MS, etc.) in ____ (field), then, graduating seniors will ____ (PLO).

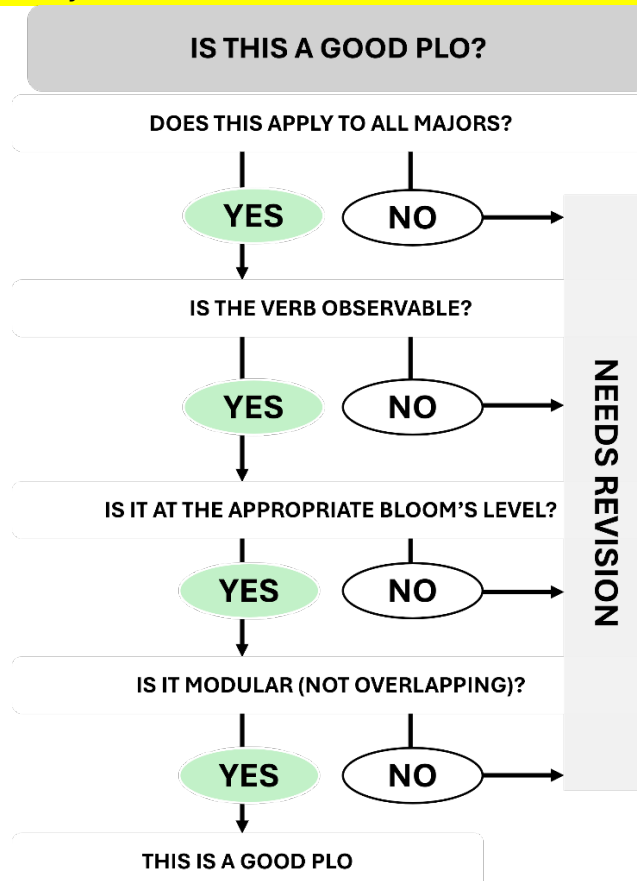
seniors ~~should~~ ...
seniors ~~have the ability to~~ ...

Common Pitfalls

- Writing outcomes not taught within the program
- Writing outcomes that only apply to a subset of students
- Using vague verbs
- Describing activities (e.g., “students complete a project”) instead of learning outcomes
- Combining multiple outcomes into one

Tips for Writing Strong PLOs

- Use precise, observable verbs from Bloom’s Taxonomy
 - Level 3:** Use knowledge in new situations
 - Level 4:** Break down information into parts
 - Level 5:** Make judgments based on criteria
 - Level 6:** Produce original work or solutions
- Focus on what students will demonstrate, not what they will complete
- Ensure each PLO is distinct (no overlap)
- Write outcomes that reflect program-level mastery



WEAK	STRONGER
Students will demonstrate proficiency in teaching. (Problem: Applies only to TAs, not the program.)	Students will apply appropriate digital tools to design solutions in their discipline.
Students will understand research ethics. (Problem: “Understand” is not observable.)	Students will analyze research scenarios to justify ethical decisions.
Students will complete an ethics case. (Problem: Focuses on task, not performance.)	Students will evaluate the effectiveness of policy-making strategies in diverse contexts.
Students will demonstrate leadership skills corresponding to this degree. (Problem: Vague, indicates no consensus)	Students will manage teams by applying advanced leadership principles.

Need Help?

There are no one-solution-fits-all in assessment. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) can support you at every step—ensuring your approach fits your program’s goals, resources, and capacity.

In-depth [Assessment Guides](#)
[OIE Website](#)